

Christ Episcopal Church in Columbia, MD

Sermon for Epiphany II

January 14, 2024

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I, for one, am grateful for this season, the season of growing light. I don't like the dark, long days of December and, while Christmas is a great distraction, I get the creeps when it's 5:00 and it's dark outside.

Sunset is now after 5PM! Well... barely, but I'll take it—more light with each passing day!

We "Lutherpalian" liturgical Christians recognize this season of increasing light as Epiphany, where, after the nativity of our Lord, we see who Jesus is in more and more light.

He *is* the light, and, along with those early followers like Peter and Andrew and Philip and Nathaniel, we come to see that. With each gospel story, we see a little more light-- we see who he is.

But maybe this season of growing light isn't just about seeing Jesus for who he is, but seeing ourselves for who *we* are as well.

Our gospel has Jesus hitting the ground running to seek out and find followers. Right before the passage we read, John points Jesus out to two of his followers, and when they ask Jesus where he's staying, Jesus says come and see. Evidently they *do* see, so one of them, Andrew, convinces his brother—none other than Simon Peter-- to check out this messiah.

That's where we pick up in today's gospel--the next day, in Galilee, when Jesus spots Philip and says, Follow me. Philip then sees Nathaniel and is over-the-moon excited to tell him that Jesus is the messiah. Nathaniel gives a snarky remark about Jesus' hometown, but Jesus is undeterred. He sees Nathaniel for who he really is, truly not deceitful, and Nathaniel pretty quickly sees who Jesus is.

The light passes from one person to another and gets brighter all the time. It's kind of like those Christmas Eve services where one person lights the candle of the person next to them and before you know it the dark church is bright with light. All it takes is a simple "come and see" who Jesus is, and Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathaniel see *themselves* in a different light—they are disciples.

I want to tell you about a Community of St. Dysmas brother whose real name I don't remember. We just called him Chains, because of the dozen or so cheap plastic rosaries he wore around his neck

He cut quite the striking figure. He decorated his prison issue t-shirts in bright, colorful designs with Bible verses and he was quite proud of his wearable art work. And, with all those plastic rosaries around his neck, I kidded him I could always tell when he walked in by the jangling noises.

One evening he came to me and said, "Good news, Pastor Susan! I'm getting out next week! I'm so excited to get home!"

That was in October.

Next week he was back at worship. He said, "well, there's been some holdup with my paperwork –but I'll be home before Thanksgiving—I'll eat my momma's turkey dinner and see my family!"

But Thanksgiving came and went, and there he was at worship each week. I could see he was getting frustrated, as any of us would, but I encouraged him to ask God for patience, and at the right time he'd be getting out.

"Yeah," he said, "I'll be home for Christmas with my family, I'll see the tree, it'll be great."

But, then Christmas came and went.

The long weeks of dark winter stretched on, and he faithfully came to worship and prayed for patience and faith while the work to get him released was completed. It was wearing on him, I could see, but he was hanging in.

Then one evening, he came in to worship noticeably upset and angry, and without his trademark beads around his neck. He walked into worship pounding his fist against his hand, and muttering, "I'm gonna get him. I'm gonna punch him out."

Someone had stolen his beads, and he was mad. I don't blame him—seriously!-- Those cheap plastic beads were of no value to anyone except him, someone was just trying to mess with him. And frankly, if I was him, I'd want to punch someone out too.

So I took his hands and said, "We're going to pray; we're going to pray for strength and patience and peace for you, because there's no other way to deal with this and if you do anything stupid you're in here another 10-15. You hear me??"

So we prayed, and when I got home that night I prayed for him again. And I prayed all week and worried and wondered if he had been able to control his temper and have the strength he needed to let this go.

So, when I went in the following week, I didn't know what I see—but he was there and he was ok... he was better than ok. He was more at peace than I'd ever seen him. There was light about him you couldn't see with your eyes, but you could with your heart. He said, "You know, they can take away my beads, but they can't take away who I am. They can't take away my faith."

I'm pretty sure he had plenty of chances that week to find someone to blame and punch him out.

But somehow that's not what happened. Somehow, he was no longer walking in the dark; he was walking in the light. Somehow, by seeing Jesus in his life, he saw who *he* really is.

When you see Jesus for who he is, you might just see yourself for who you are, too. You are beloved. You are healed and strengthened. You are a child of the light.

We rightly expect Epiphany to be a time of revelation and growing light. We anticipate growing in the light that came to us at Christmas and knowing more deeply who Jesus is. But we might not realize that it's not only about who he is, but it's about who we are too.

So this Epiphany, see the light of Jesus and see yourself in that light. Amen